

By STUART EARP: Wycombe Wanderers 3, Sutton United 0

MISCUED

TWO cracking second half goals from Mick Holifield steered Wycombe Wanderers to a comfortable victory over Sutton United at Loakes Park on Saturday and boosted the club's ambitions for the Rothmans Isthmian League title.

The Blues, after dropping two points at Stortford last week, needed a good performance to get back on form and also help manager John Reardon, who took over last week when Ted Powell was dismissed. Powell, in fact, watched this game from the terraces and must have had mixed feelings. He saw his team hit three goals past Sutton whom he has also managed in the past.

With the top two clubs, Dagenham and Enfield, both drawing their games, these three points became even

more useful, moving Wycombe to within two points of Dagenham. Enfield are eight points clear but Wanderers have three games in hand. Clearly, the title race is only just beginning and there is no reason why the Blues can't be in there when it reaches its climax.

Much will depend on whether they accept their goalscoring chances in the remaining matches — something that has plagued them this season. Saturday was no exception and had they accepted only half of the opportunities that came their way, Sutton would have gone home with five or six put past them. As it was, three goals gave Wanderers their fourth £40 bonus of the season.

Certainly, this was one of the poorest Sutton sides to visit Loakes Park for some time. Lacking fire power up front, they needed all the skills of former Wycombe favourite Larry

Pritchard, playing his 400th game for the club, to keep them afloat plus some brilliant saves from Rick Collier.

Wycombe made three changes from last week's team bringing in John Maskell, Graham Mackenzie and Dylan Evans. Tony Horseman might well have been included had he not received a leg injury from the boot of Maskell during training. Of the changes, Evans was the most successful. Dylan was a constant danger up front and used the ball intelligently. 'Jock' Mackenzie looked good on many occasions but spoilt his overall game with poor distribution at times. If he could establish a regular place in midfield, he looks to have a great future.

John Priestley deserves credit for a solid performance and his passing was vastly improved.

The chances started coming after only a minute of a game well handled by referee Ernie Day, when Alan Phillips' header was miscued by John Rains and Howard Kettleborough raced through but drove too early and past the post. Rains' error might well have affected him for this usually safe defender had an unhappy afternoon.

Collier made the first of a string of superb saves in the eighth minute to halt a tremendous Wycombe attack. Paul Birdseye found Mackenzie whose early near post cross was hit first time by Ian Pearson. Collier struck out an instinctive arm and pushed the ball away.

But Wanderers were not to be denied. Pearson's pass to Evans looked long but Rains again miscued his pass and Evans took the ball on and crossed low into the box. Gary Cross came thundering in to clear but his attempt hit Collier and rolled into the net.

After the breakthrough Wanderers went off the boil and allowed Sutton into the game. Some of United's football looked promising but Garry Butler seldom troubled Keith Mead and Phillips while Ricky Kidd had a quiet afternoon. Just before the break Fran Cowley fired in Sutton's best effort of the half which Maskell saved well.

The second half began quietly but then developed into one-way traffic towards the Sutton net. In the 52nd minute Pearson, who had a quiet first 45 minutes, produced a flash of brilliance when he turned to hammer in a powerful left foot drive that Collier tipped over the crossbar.

Soon afterwards Kettleborough won the race to a through ball from Mead but toe-poked straight at Collier. 'Kets' was out of luck three minutes later when Collier palmed his effort onto the foot of an upright.

By now, Wycombe had an iron-hard grip on the game which they never looked like relinquishing. Only the brilliance of Collier prevented another goal when Pearson ran along the edge of the box and turned in another left footed drive that the goalkeeper somehow pushed away.

GREAT MOVE

More goals just had to come and in the 75th minute, the Blues produced a great move for the second. Pearson was brought down near the wing and he took the free kick himself. Birdseye made a late run that caught the defence napping and headed into the middle where Holifield raced in to nod the ball home. Collier got a touch to the ball but couldn't prevent it entering the net.

Birdseye headed over from three yards while at the other end Maskell came out quickly to block Butler's shot after Mead's back pass had fallen short of the mark. It was John's only save of the half.

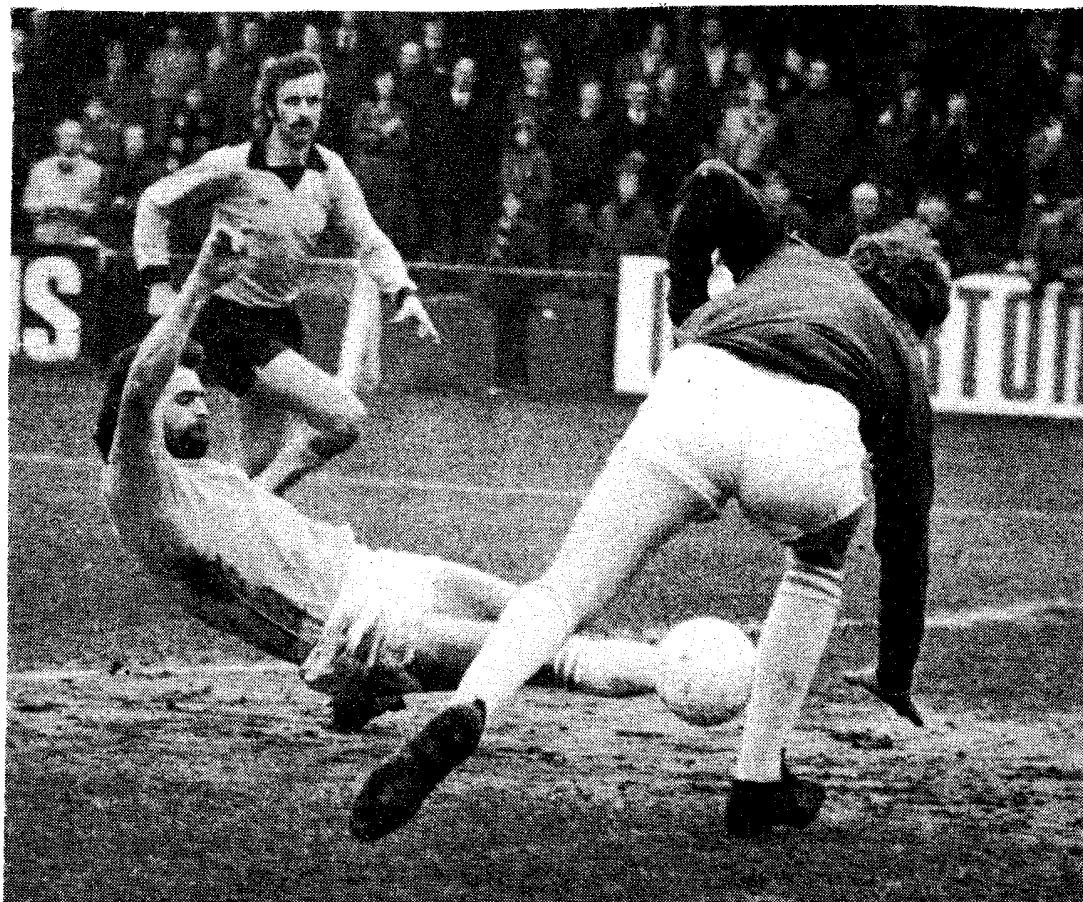
In the 82nd minute Mackenzie was robbed of a goal by the thickness of an upright. Phillips won the ball and sent Pearson away. He found Mackenzie whose well struck drive cannoned off the woodwork.

Then, with five minutes left, Holifield raced in to hit the third and final goal. Bob Davies, who enjoyed another consistent game at left back, chipped a cross to Evans who cleverly laid the ball down to Holifield. Mick revels in these situations when he can run at defences and he left two defenders trailing as he sprinted into the box and crashed the ball past Collier.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell, P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, R. Davies, G. Mackenzie, J. Priestley, M. Holifield, D. Evans, H. Kettleborough, I. Pearson. Sub S. Hill (not used).

SUTTON: R. Collier, G. Cross, J. Rains, S. Bangs, A. Cook, F. Cowley, L. Pritchard, P. McKinnon, S. Ibbotson, R. Kidd, G. Butler. Sub J. Honeywood (not used).

Referee: E. Day (Walthamstow).
Half-time: 1-0. **Goalscorers:** Holifield 2 (75, 85), Cross o.g. (14).
Official attendance: 3,308.



The agony of an own goal. Above: Gary Cross gets his foot to this cross from Dylan Evans (out of picture) but (below) can only send the ball against the body of his goalkeeper Collier and into the net.